Robots, Automata, and Avatars	Douglas Eacho
	Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, CLTA
DRM 224 Fall	douglas.eacho@utoronto.ca
Mondays, 2-5	
Robarts Library 14190	Office: University College A307
https://utoronto.zoom.us/my/dougeacho	Office hours: Thursdays, 2-4

Course Description

Across centuries and global traditions, theatre has staged imaginations - and real demonstrations - of mechanical life. This course introduces students to a wide range of technological performers, from science-fiction drama to drone ballets, from baroque automata to A.I. playwrighting. Special attention will be paid to how these figures both construct and dismantle concepts of race, gender, and class. They will also prompt broader questions about how live theatre relates to recorded media, about the place of technology in society, and about how we perform ourselves on the internet.

Special sessions at the BMO Lab in Creative Research in the Arts, Performance, Emerging Technologies, and A.I. will allow students to explore these questions through live performance themselves.

Texts

All texts will be uploaded to Quercus, with the exception of two required plays, and one video game:

> Karel Čapek, *R.U.R. (Rossom's Universal Robots)*
>
> George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*
>
> Matthew Seiji Burns, *ELIZA*

The plays are both available at the bookstore. They are also in the public domain, and can be read online or downloaded from Project Gutenberg. The game *ELIZA* can be purchased for $17 CAD on any personal computer (Mac/Linux/PC) via Steam, or, on the Nintendo Switch.

Assignments

Lab Participation   30%

We will have three full workshop sessions at the BMO Lab, where students will interact with experimental performance technology and make short pieces of their own in small groups. Participation will be graded on students' invention, collegiality, and attention to constructive dialogue about others' works. Each session is worth 10 points.

Essays   45%

Students will write three short -- 1000 word -- essays at the close of different units through the term. I will distribute specific essay questions one week before each due date. Students will respond with reference to the reading and themes discussed in class; no original research is necessary, though examples and case studies can come from anywhere. Each essay is worth 15 points.

Final Performance   25%

In small groups, students will devise an original performance that comments on the concerns of this course, and/or employs some of the technical tools discussed. These performances may take place in the classroom, online, or at the BMO Lab; Lab technology may be used with the professor's permission. Each piece may not be longer than 15 minutes.

Every student will then submit a 1500-word reflection piece on the performance, and how it relates to class themes.

A Note on Participation

Participation does not have its own place on this rubric, but a lack of participation could drag your grade down. I expect all students to attend all class sessions, do all reading, and particpate fully in our conversations. If you are having difficulty meeting this expectation, I will contact you. If this persists, you can expect to see this reflected in your grade.

Late essays will lose one point (out of fifteen) for every day late. Your final reflection paper cannot be late.

Covid-19

Our first two sessions will meet on Zoom. Then, we will meet in-person, on campus. Full Covid-19 vaccination and masks are required, per University and Ontario policy.

We will move to Zoom meetings if case counts rise to levels in the city that make even such conditions dangerous. This could result in changes to the syllabus.

Additionally, we can accommodate students each week calling in via Zoom if you are showing Covid symptoms, or have been exposed to a known Covid case. Please give whatever notice possible.

Office hours will be held both online and in person. For those two hours, I'll be in A307, with Zoom open, come by however you prefer.

When on Zoom, camera and microphone participation is strongly encouraged.

Accomodation

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. Feel free to communicate any ways I can help you directly with me, or through Accessibility Services: accessibility.services@utoronto.ca

Academic Integrity

I take academic integrity extremely seriously. Do your own work, and acknowledge sources of information and ideas as appropriate. Violation of the University's *Code of Behaviour* will likely result, at the least, in a failing mark.

Class Schedule:

1 – Sept 13 – Introduction (online)

    No readings. We will introduce the course, and engage in a creative workshop.

2 – Sept 20 – Robots 1: The Robot as Actress; the Actress as Robot (online)

    E.T.A. Hoffman, "The Sand-Man"

    Karel Čapek, *R.U.R. (Rossom's Universal Robots)*

    Oriza Hirata, "I, Robot" and "Sayonara," trans. Joanna Kriese, Bryerly Long, and Hiroko
        Matsuda.

3 – Sept 27 – Robots 2: The Fembot Strikes Back

    Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in
        the 1980s"
    Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, "The Spectatorial Body in Multimedia Performance"

4 – Oct 4 – LAB: The Body as Media

    Essay #1 (on robots) due

Oct 11: Thanksgiving holiday, no class

5 – Oct 18 – A.I. : The Theater of Automation

    George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*

    Mathew Seiji Burns, *ELIZA*

    Astra Taylor, "The Automation Charade."

6 – Oct 25 – LAB: A.I. Drama

    Annie Dorsen, *A Piece of Work*

7 – Nov 1 – Automata 1: Divine Automata

 Essay #2 (on A.I.) due

 Jessica Riskin, "Machines in the Garden," from *The Restless Clock*

 Heinrich von Kleist, "On the Marionette Theatre"

Nov 8: Reading week, no class

8 – Nov 15 – Automata 2: Watching the Automatic

 Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," trans. James Strachey.

 Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley," trans. Karl F. MacDorman & Norri Kageki.

 Catie Cuan, "Dances with Robots"

9 – Nov 22 – LAB: Motion Capture

 Essay #3 (on automata) due

 Oskar Schlemmer. "Man and Art-Figure," from *The Theater of the Bauhaus*

10 – Nov 29 – Avatars

 Tom Boellstorff. "Personhood," from *Coming of Age in Second Life*

 Gob Squad. *Western Society*. DVD

11 – Dec 6 – Final Performances

 Final performances